

Luke 2:39-52 (ESV)

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.

⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."

⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

JESUS Christ is the eternal Son of God who became flesh and blood and dwelt among us for a time, 33 years to be exact.

Of those 33 years we know very little about the days of his youth. Matthew 2 and Luke 2 are the only credible sources.

So we're left with a couple of summary statements and this incident at the Temple. The first summary statement is found in verse 40.

Luke 2:40 (ESV)

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

What was it like to grow up in Nazareth as a young boy, but not as an ordinary boy?

Many imagine JESUS to be more of a superhero rather than the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

Our imaginations are informed more by the movies than by the Scriptures. Supernatural powers are used to entertain us rather than to humble us before our maker.

There's no evidence that JESUS lived anything but a normal life in the days of his youth. He didn't dazzle his playmates with his superpowers or live a secret double life.

He had the attributes that a parent would want in any of their children. JESUS grew, became strong, was filled with wisdom, and God's grace was upon him.

Let's take that verse a phrase at a time. First of all, JESUS grew. From the time of his conception, in his infancy, and through his years as an adolescent, JESUS grew as most children do.

As a parent, you watch them grow but you don't notice it until you look back. One of my favorite activities is to look back at pictures of our children when they were little.

Having our whole family together for Christmas reminded me of how things have changed.

I used to wonder why adults cry at graduations and weddings. It's because we remember. Children grow up on us and all we can do is to watch and marvel.

JESUS grew up in Nazareth. While he was growing up, his parents provided the best they could. They got help from the Wisemen, but once they got back to Nazareth, they were just like any other family.

Providing so that your children can grow is one of the most rewarding experiences of life. It's also one of the toughest. In some ways it's harder today than ever.

Children don't have to have everything. They need food, shelter, love and support. If you can provide those things, you're doing okay.

The advantage of growing up in Nazareth was that everybody was poor there. If you could feed your family and give them a place to lay their head at night, you were doing just fine.

Today we're surrounded by affluence, but that's not the essence of life. If you think that you're less than a good parent because your kids don't have a hover board or the latest iPhone, you're being deceived.

JESUS grew up in Nazareth over 2,000 years ago. He did just fine without the gadgets that are pushed at us today. JESUS not only grew, but it says that he became strong.

This probably refers to his physical stature and health. He grew up with the vigor of youth. His energy and enthusiasm probably entertained and wore out his parents.

JESUS grew up strong and healthy. With a sanctified imagination, you can almost picture JESUS as a boy running through the fields and playing with friends.

It almost seems sacrilegious to think of the Son of God at play. But he most certainly did. That's what children do, whether they are strong and healthy or not.

One of the great blessings of having a special needs daughter is that we've gotten to know a number of young people with handicaps. They may not be able to do what other children can do, but they too love to play. They love attention. They're happy.

Being conceived by the Holy Spirit, JESUS didn't share our sinful nature. But he did understand our infirmities and our weaknesses.

JESUS grew up strong and healthy. But when he was older, he was very mindful of those who weren't. He didn't heal every lame person, or give sight to all who were blind. The handicapped have a place in God's kingdom as well.

Growing up in Nazareth JESUS saw the plight of the poor; the struggles of the weak; the hardships of the infirmed. JESUS didn't live a sheltered life. Our children shouldn't either.

Our kids need to be in nursing homes; or visit with shut-ins. They need to go to Carriage Town Ministries. They need to see the same world that our Savior saw.

When we had our two older children home we made sure that we could all visit their grandma together. Mom's condition has changed pretty dramatically since their last visit home.

They love their grandmother; it was hard to see her the way she is now. Love enters into the hardships of life; up close and direct. It knows the sights, the sounds, the smells of real life in a fallen world.

JESUS wasn't beamed down from heaven to rescue the world from sin and death. He was born of a woman; raised as a child in a poor family, and experienced life just like we do.

We don't know that much about what life was like for JESUS as he grew up, but it does say here that he was filled with wisdom and the grace or favor of God was upon him.

Wisdom goes beyond knowledge. It enables you to see life from God's perspective. The grace of God allows you to draw on God's character rather than on your sinful nature.

The God that we worship is compassionate, kind, slow to anger and abounding in love. JESUS was that kind of child. Luke 2:40

None of our children are sinless. Every child that grows up in the church will have to learn wisdom and purposely seek out God's grace. That's why they need to learn about JESUS early in life.

They need to see that there is a way to live that is different from the rest of the world. If you belong to JESUS, you treat others as he did; you spend time with those who are hurting; you show love to the unlovable.

Growing up in America is very different from growing up in Nazareth. That's why being in The Father's House is so important.

Luke 2:41-42

It was the custom of a faithful Jewish family to travel to Jerusalem for the Passover. They did it every year as a community of believers.

Going to the House of the LORD has always been important for the children of God. While God is present everywhere, going to a designated place of worship has always been the custom of God's people.

JESUS was very comfortable in the Temple setting. It was natural for him to be in a place of worship. There JESUS would watch, listen and learn.

When he was 12 years old, he stayed behind the rest of the group and began to ask the elders questions. You can learn a lot about a person by the questions that they ask.

Probing questions. An inquisitive mind will want to deal with the bigger issues of life:

- What's wrong with the world that there is so much sickness, suffering and death?
- What's wrong with me that I so often do what I know I shouldn't?
- Why am I here; what is God's purpose for my life?

Young people can start asking those conceptual questions at an early age. It was typical back then for a 12 year old to start the transition into adulthood. People had to grow up much more quickly in days gone by.

Life was hard. Necessities didn't come easy. Everybody had to pull their weight. You'd think that that would make matters of faith and practice a luxury for just a few of the wealthy.

Just the opposite. Being poor didn't stop families from traveling a great distance to worship; and it didn't stop this 12 year old from asking probing questions.

Age is not really the best reflector of maturity; wealth is not the best indicator of God's blessing.

JESUS asked questions that made the elders and teachers of the Law think more deeply about their traditions. That's the sign of a good student.

I suspect that JESUS began by asking about the sacrifices at the temple. He may have asked about why God would ask for such sacrifices, and what they pointed to.

Good questions are always asked in the context of faith. Faith understands that there is truth to be known that's deeper than the surface of things.

A skeptic or cynic will ask all kinds of questions without any expectations that there are any answers. {They pride themselves and think that they are clever if they can ask an unanswerable question.}

A person of faith knows that even when the answers are elusive, God is still there.

The big questions of life need to be dealt with in the context of faith within the household of God. They need to be asked in the Father's House.

The church is a place where the people of God go to worship and to wrestle with those matters which are beyond our natural understanding.

- The public square of today's world is secular.
- Pop culture isn't interested in anything that will force you to think too deeply.
- Technology is marketed as a pathway to the good life so as to capture our imagination.

Where else but at the Father's House will you find a place where there is a reverence for the sacred?

Where else will you come to grips with that which is bigger than anything that man could make?

The Father's House is the place where life is put into an eternal perspective.

I trust that you are here this morning not just to show up for church, but to worship the God who made you and the Savior who loved you enough to enter into your world.

Around 20 years after this incident in the Temple, JESUS would clear out the Temple courts because He said that my house {His Father's House} was to be a house of prayer. (Matthew 21:13)

It still is. Perhaps your prayer this morning has to do with questions that you've been wrestling with.

- If God is good, then why is there human suffering here on earth?
- Why are some people spared loss and hardship, while others live with those things every day?
- If God is sovereign, why doesn't he just make all things right now, instead of later?

Perhaps your prayer is that of repentance and remorse over things in the past that can't be changed. That would be a prayer that God would surely honor.

Perhaps your prayer is that of anguish and being broken hearted. Why are you downcast, O my soul?

The Father's House is the place to deal with any or all of those matters. This is the place where we hear God's Word proclaimed; where the sacraments are given as a reminder of the Gospel promises.

This is a place where we humble ourselves before God. This is the place where JESUS is still doing His Father's business, which is bringing sinners to the place of forgiveness and new life.

Luke 2:52 (ESV)

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

The end of our text says that JESUS grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. May that be your story as well as we enter into this new year.